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The Unions vs. the Proletariat

The “Miners March” in Romania

Péter Konok

December 7, 2009

“Is it true that if the miners arrive in Bucharest then the system will really be overthrown? I can see an even more serious situation. It didn’t seem that the miners would come and the government would go; but it seemed that democracy would fail. The movement of the civil society, the demonstrations in Bucharest and Timisoara pushed the events rather in such a direction which showed that there is a very definite demarcation line in the country. And if the miners had marched into Bucharest it would have been similar to a civil war situation. (...) The interest of the nation was to stop this process.”

(Interview with Gabor Kolumbar, president of the Council of Hargitha county)

Zhil-valley, Romania, January 1999

The events we want to write about are not special ones at all. They mark a moment of the struggle of the worldwide proletariat, the present situation of our class. Although these struggles

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were firmly influenced by the capitalist leaders and ideologies, we should see as well as their forceful points: the ruptures our fellow-proletarians made with ideology of non-violence, minimum-programs, the interests of the national economy etc. Nevertheless, weaknesses were numerous: the vast majority of the proletarians there were in the lack of understanding their own proletarian interests, to recognise themselves not as “miners of the Zhil-valley”, not as “members of the trade-unions” even not as “citizens of Romania”, but proletarians, destined to struggle against capital, the more they believed “their leaders” who turned the destructive anger of the proletarians into a bloody democratic marching parade through the snowy Carpathians¹.

As we going to see, the struggle was not really isolated: the proletarians made efforts to break through the walls that separate them from each other: “miners” and “workers”, “peasants of the villages” and “soldiers” “local people” and “foreigners”... But the struggle was hardly able to break out of the framework of the trade unions and miners’ organisations. The content of the struggle itself was rather a proletarian content: at the beginning the workers had no demands from the state, they just wanted to attack and destroy the circumstances in which they lived – in fact, nevertheless not *expressis verbis*, the world of the capital. Although their activities were against the unions in practice and social content, they almost never questioned the leading position of the same unions – especially the most radical one, led by the “workers’ leader”, “the Black Star of Coal”, Miron Cozma. He is the leader of the League of Free Miners’ Union since its (then officially illegal) birth in 1977. The LFMU was created when in that year miners in the Zhil-valley started to struggle against the cut of their wages, and demanded better working conditions and health-care. For days Petroseni, the most important town of the region and the centre of the mine-firm,

¹ Later we will see, how the capitalist forces used even the geographical possibilities to cool down and repress the movement.

functioning. But practically they broke with a lot of democratic ball-and-chains, when attacked violently the state. The most determined minority of them wanted to continue the struggle after the victory-orgy of the unions and the government.

What is very important in these small events is the function of the enemy. The bloody virtuosity, how Miron Cozma led the proletarians into trap. The way, how the bourgeoisie is capable to calm down the proletarians for a while without any real concession. How they can operate with – not only verbal – radicalism. How they can divide us.

“In certain cases, the division of labour between the apparatuses of the bourgeois state (for example between unions and the forces of order) allows even a certain dose of minoritarian violence, which is of course never attacks the bourgeois order. Thus as long as the majority of the demonstration are peacefully contained by interminable union speeches, they tolerate or even promote a radical part of the demonstrators breaking away and throwing themselves at the special forces of the police who are specially prepared for this to happen. The bourgeoisie and its property remain well protected and it takes advantage of the situation to arrest radical proletarians and to put possible activists on file. Each state force carries out its function, one using truncheons, the other using diversion (which is obviously not to say that the unions don't use overt repression as well). So the force of the proletariat, incapable of leading itself towards its own goal and using minoritarian violence against its real class enemies, is squandered without calling capital into question.”

(General Characteristics of Recent Struggles – Communism, No. 9., 1995.)

were under the control of the miners – but after all the army occupied the town and killed a lot of – concrete numbers are not known – proletarians. After the rebellion the LFMU, a “radical” and “illegal” trade union was formed mainly by the inspiration of Securitate, the Romanian secret police in that time², according to the memoirs of some ex-Securitate members. The model of the LFMU was the polish Solidarnosc, so we can easily call Cozma the rumanian Walesa...

Cozma himself is a typical, nevertheless extravagant actor of the trade-union theatre – an extremist expert for extremely explosive tasks. He always wears miner-suits, protective hat and miner-lamp (although his one – contrary to the workers' – is always clean and brand new...). He drinks a lot together with “his” people, often goes to the local pubs, he is a football-fan (just as the workers – but he is the owner of the most local pubs and the football-club “Jiul-Zhil”). After 1989 his union became legal officially too. In January 1990 thousands of proletarians – among them a lot of miners – rebelled in the streets of Bucharest against the “recuperators of the revolution” – they destroyed the offices of political parties, looted shops and attacked a mass of anti-protest-demonstrators³.

² After 1989 the new government changed the name of Securitate. Of course, the content remained the same. Securitate was so strongly hated by the proletarians, that in most of the parts of Rumania the uprisings started with the killing of people from whom it was known, that they were members of the “Secu”. Foreign media after the Rumanian revolution” wanted to mystify the role of Securitate, and created the myth of the “drug addict, fanatised secu agents, the negative, evil super-heroes” – the media used the same terminology when they were talking about the “miners” after the 1999 January events – etc. to hide the social reality of the securitates all over the world, as unavoidable parts of bourgeois state.

³ Later this events – happened in January – was presented by the media, that the miners and workers came by the order of Ion Iliescu, post-Stalinist leader of the party FSN (Front of National Saving), later president of Rumania. It is a complete lie – the proletarians attacked and burned some offices the FSN as well, and only the police and the army – ordered by Iliescu – were able to kick them out from the town. These events are always mixed by the media with the “miners' march” of June, same year, where really Iliescu called – not the miners, but

Of course, Cozma was there to calm them — he became the main specialist of the bourgeoisie in the Zhil-valley to canalise proletarian anger. He went to Bucharest next year again — although he did everything he could, without risking his credibility, to stop the proletarians. On September 24–27, 1991, thousands of proletarians occupied the trains, went to Bucharest, killed a lot of policemen, occupied the house of Parliament — and were unable to step forward after all. Cozma went with them, and that was the moment, when his moment came: he begin to negotiate... The prime minister fell, everything else remained. Business as usual...

Cozma became a kind of king in the Petroseni-region — he owned the most of the pubs, the local football club, a lot of shops. He became the godfather of local mafia. As he wanted to be elected to Parliament, he joined to the “Party of Great-Rumania” (PRM), a populist party, which mixed extreme-right chauvinism with extreme left workerism, a “red-brown” party, as this type is called in Russia nowadays, or we should say an East-European isotope of a neo-Peronist party. When he saw his sinking credibility among “his fellow-miners”, he made himself sentenced to prison for seven and a half years for organising illegal strike in 1991 and 1992 — of course, in reality he spent only five months under a light house arrest in his own luxury villa.

Anyway, if we are dealing with the history of Cozma is not because he, personally, would be so important. But he is a typical representative of the spectacle of the radical workers’ leader to the miners, while — as the media never missed to suggest it — as the corrupt, maffia-like leader of a privileged cast — the miners of the

the union. (mis)Led by Cozma, some thousand miners went to Bucharest to fight against the protestors against FSN and Iliescu, but the events went farther, and the miners destroyed the center of the town, three people were killed. The content of the two events are completely opposite: while in June the miners were just tools in an inter-bourgeois conflict, and were used by the more intelligent bourgeois fraction to preventing from the escalation of proletarian anger, the rebels in January did not combined with any bourgeois forces.

attacked them. Big battle started between the determined proletarians and the ones who thought, they had won. But, of course, the majority went home. On their way back they were attacked by the angry and disappointed local proletarians, who some days before had hailed them.

The media immediately started to create stories. News writers “discovered”, that the miners were led by the Libyan secret police and the Moshad. They discovered, that the miners were supplied LSD by the CIA, and their aim was to open the Rumanian borders for the Hungarian army. The parties of the Hungarian minority declared, that the aim of the “Rumanian miners”, who are “Moldavian peasants and gipsies by origin” was to kill the leaders of the Hungarian minorities. But all of the media agreed, that the aim of the miners was to destroy democracy, state, to establish disorder, chaos and anarchy.

The government showed enough power — that was the opinion of the EU ambassador. They continued the closing downs of the mines, not to keep even the little agreement they had promised before. The political game was won by the government: the PRM became criminalised, Cozma himself was sentenced to 18 years of prison⁹).

This events were only a small — but rather typical — episode of the struggle of our class worldwide. The ruptures these proletarians made were not extremely deep ones — they were influenced by the role of trade unions, by sectorialism, by democratic way of

⁹ At 16th of February he and some hundreds of activists of his union marched again towards Bucharest. Cozma wanted to eliminate the sentence. The media presented this action, as another “miners march” — but this “march” was smashed by the first police barricade, the special forces caught Cozma and expelled the protestors home. Cozma started his punishment. Anyway, we have to see the professionalism of a real expert: the management of the prison offered him a good cell with only two other prisoners. He refused, and wanted to go to a big room with a lot of prisoners. They let him. Two weeks later a riot broke out in the prison to show solidarity with “the leader of the workers”, Miron Cozma, and the prisoners demanded his immediate release..!

Early in the morning Vasile met the ambassador of Germany. The ambassador ensured him about all the help of all the countries of the EU (Germany was the president of the EU then), in case the negotiations would fail. At noon Vasile and his company arrived at Cozia. Cozma and his branch were already there. The proletarians were at the main square of Rimnicu Vilcea, in the snow-storm, while some parts already started to go towards Cozia. The army gathered around the area.

The negotiations lasted from 2 to 6 PM. At 6 Vasile declared, that they had an agreement, the miners should go home. Enormous confusion broke out in the square. The proletarians saw Cozma, who, without a word, leaved the town in his luxury car. Some activists of the trade unions came to the square with loudspeakers, and told the crowd the fruits of the negotiations. The government promised not to close the two factories, if the trade unions guarantee a 30% less loss next year (it was already promised, and the miners refused). The government promised 35% rise of the wages⁸. The EU promised 200 million dollars to develop the mines of the region.

“It seems, that after the calming of the anger, minister Bercenau will continue – maybe a bit later – the reductions in the mine industry, and the painful measures he will tactically pass over to the trade unions.”
(HVG – Weekly World Economy – leading Hungarian economical newspaper, 30. January, 1999)

Some parts of the demonstrators started to go home. Others, among them the non-miners, the local proletarians and a lot of miners, of course, who saw more clearly the nothing they won,

⁸ Nota bene: the Cozma-plan demanded 200–250%; now the government promised 35%; two days later they changed it to 30%; a bit later 18%, but only for those, who “participated in the struggle of our union”. After 16th February – the crushing of the next “miners march” and the arrest of Cozma – they reduced it to 10,5%. In reality the miners got a 8,5% rise in March – in a country, where there is an inflation of 50% a year!

Zhil-valley. According to the media-legend, the Zhil-valley miners earn three times more than the average in Rumania, work less, and have some other special privileges, like, for example lower age to reach pension. The bourgeoisie always tries to divide us; they always present proletarians on struggle as “lazy bastards”, who are just sucking the blood of their fellow workers; the proletarians on struggle always “earn more than the average”... Let’s have a look at the deadly reality of the Zhil-valley miners, into the life of the privileged cast... in the last years of a bloodsucker century of capitalist exploitation. They – according to the statistics – earn 50% more than the “Rumanian average” (150 USD/month) – but it is still not enough to survive. There is less and less work in the Zhil-valley, but the miners who got the sack cannot move from Petroseni, since they are unable to sell their flats. These flats has no price at all, since nobody wants to buy a flat in Petroseni – even not for a 100 (!) dollars, which is now the price. The whole area is devastated, overpolluted, killed by capital. One of the more and more numerous places on Earth, where life is already almost impossible. The miners are unable to find a job and a place to live in another place if they loose their job – their good, well paid job⁴.

The shops in the Zhil-region are mostly half-empty. Only the most basic food – bread, eggs, tins, bean – and the very bad quality, but cheap alcohol and cigarette is available for the “well-paid” miners. A big part of the shops are owned by the Zhil-valley Coal Mines Company (CNH): here they can buy things by credit – but, of course, it is far more expensive. It is even less possibility for the miners’ families to find a job. Most of the women are unemployed. Kids are few – “We don’t have safety, energy and money for children” – said a miner – “free condoms are distributed by the firm”.

⁴ In 1991 more than two thousand accidents happened in the mines of the region. As there are less and less coal in the mines, it is more and more dangerous to exploit them. The IMF and the Rumanian government can use this fact to stress, that they close the mines not only because their non-productivity, but especially because of humanitarian causes.

So, briefly, this is the Brave New World which capital imposes on us.

The mission of the IMF is already in 1997 declared, that the most of the Zhil-valley mines must be closed until the year 2000, but the Rumanian government hesitated — they saw the danger on the social peace such an action could cause. But at the end of 1998 Francois Etori, the leader of the Bucharest mission of the IMF made it clear, that the Rumanian government won't get more credits unless it begins to close the mines in the valley. So the government decided to close two of the smallest mines, Dalja and Barbateni, which together had 1800 workers, on 10th December 1998.

The anger of the miners was bigger than the government and the unions had expected before. They promised everything to the miners, who were planned to get the sack. They promised new jobs in the region, education, or houses and fields in other parts of the country. But the miners already know what these promises worth: in some neighbouring regions (just as Olteni) 19 thousand miners got the sack during 1997–98. For them the bourgeoisie have promised the same. For this 19.000 miners the capitalists established 1100 new jobs (!), most of them are very low paid, unskilled jobs, other parts are administrative — not really for miners. Well, they kindly offered also an opportunity to join the police or the army. And they offered for them houses and fields in a region, where from the original habitants already fled, because of the terrible living conditions, the bad fields in overpolluted marshes... No one from the 19 thousand accepted that houses.

Facing the situation, the miners stopped working. In the 4th of January 1999 15.000 miners stopped working. They gathered around the mines to discuss what is to be done. “The revolution was confiscated. Nothing has changed. We need a new revolution”⁵ — declared a miner to the reporters. Cozma — who

⁵ In Rumania the events of December 1989 — January 1990, when — after a defeated proletarian uprising — the government has changed, officially called

the army tanks stopped the minority, the march arrived at Rimnicu Vilcea.

In the evening an emergency talk was held at the government. The minister of interior, Gavril Dejeu lost its seat, because he was not determined enough. The new minister, Constantin Dudu Ionesco was famous for being without any inhibitions. He declared state of emergency for the next day, from 2 PM, if the miners won't start to go back to Petroseni — anyway, it was only the declaration, since almost all the measures of the state of emergency had already been living for days. Ionesco gave open fire order to the army — but according to some news agency, soldiers were executed because of denying the fire order already on the previous day... Radu Vasile sent a message to Cozma: next day (22th) he will meet him in the monastery of Cozia. Cozma knew, that he won — and presented to the crowd, that the main demand is fulfilled: the prime minister himself will come to negotiate.

On the 22th of January the proletarians gathered in the main square of Rimnicu Vilcea. 500 local people joined them. When they heard the news, that prime minister Radu Vasile, the financial minister Traian Remes, an industrial secretary of state and Ioan Salajan, the former Bishop of Petroseni already arrived at the place of negotiations, they became confused. A lot of proletarians wanted to move on towards Bucharest. The local proletarians wanted to march to Cozia to attack the prime minister (in 1977 the Zhil-valley miners took prime minister Ilie Verdet as hostage for some days in Petroseni). The union scabs tried to calm everybody. The armoured cars and tanks of the army surrounded the town. They planted heavy artillery to the neighbouring hills, to show, they are ready to everything. They also wanted to show, that until this moment they did not really want to stop the march — that why the proletarians were able to break through — but now the state lost his patience. Of course, it was a lie, but worked rather good to create an ideology from the impotence of the state apparatus in front of a proletarian attack.

everybody and kick out the ones, “who are not miners, just provocateurs and riff-raff” (the proletarians, who join the ranks during the road, at least 10.000 people...), the majority of the proletarians wanted to go on another way, to avoid the barricade. But some hundreds of the most determined went to the barricades and provoked the police. And in the afternoon the police let itself to be provoked, and attacked the few proletarians. For this news all the 30.000 rebels hurl themselves at the barricades, together with the local proletarians, who came back to struggle again. This was the biggest battle of the events.

More than 60 policemen injured, a 40 of them seriously or deadly. At first the police officers escaped by cars and helicopters, and after all the policemen tried to run, threw away their weapons, radios, helmets... The miners burnt a lot of police-cars, and shoot at the helicopters with the weapons they got from the police. Here they caught a police officer, who had a list with him about the most determined proletarians, of whom the police have to use “special care”. Of course, the miners knew — just as we know, just as all the proletarians have to know — what this “special care” means. Anyway, they “cared specially” of the officer... Of course, the names of Cozma or any other leader were not on this list.

The miners won the battle, and reached the top of the movement. Their energy, their anger was enough to break a strong police barricade, to get the arms — but they were not organised as proletarians, not able to see the enemy not just in the police, in the local authorities, in the helicopters of cops and reporters, in the government — but in “their own leaders”, the fucking union-fuhrers. And in this way the highest moment was already a moment of decline. After the battle the proletarians held a mass-meeting. While a minority (some hundreds) — miners and not miners — went towards Bucharest, hoping, that the others will follow them, Cozma turned the march to the north (in fact: backward) to the direction of Rimnicu Vilcea. He was sure, that after this battle the government will negotiate. He understood the situation well. And while

immediately came home from the island of Creete, were he was spending a little holiday — tried to pose some reformist demands to the workers, like 30% rising of the wages. They refused. The government promised them shares from the unprofitable mines (!). The proletarians said fuck off. Their only demand was not to close the workplaces — and they shit on the interests of the national economy.

When the bourgeoisie saw, that the proletarians don't want to stop their action, they tried to stop it another way. At first, the whole media started to spread the myth of the “rich miners” throughout Rumania to avoid proletarian solidarity. It was not really effective — at least not as effective as the media himself fanfared — as we will see. The government changed its voice. Until then, they always presented their sorry for the situation of the miners. Now they started to be cynic and arrogant: “If the miners are on strike, it is just good for the budget. During their strike we don't have to pay their salaries...” — declared frankly Ion Diaconescu, the president of the National Peasant Party (PNT, the main governing party).

From the beginning of the strike Cozma tried to negotiate with the representatives of the government. He saw, that the state must give something to the miners, other case there will be problems. He met Viorel Catamara, the president of the Economical Committee of the Senat, and he declared an agreement (among others they promised 15% rise of the salaries), but because of the aggressive behaviour of the miners Cozma did not dare to subscribe this treaty.

“revolution”. Of course, they are not talking this way about the uprising of the proletarians, but the “revolution of the nation” or “the people”, and especially about “revolution against the dictatorship of communism” — so not about the uprising (killed by them) but about the changing of the government. This miner — similarly to the rebels of Kronstadt in 1921 — well understood, that the revolution was defeated, and we, the proletarians has to accomplish it — he did not confuse it with a simple new election. He, and his fellow proletarians well understood, that the bourgeoisie is lying, when it calls its own fraction-changing “revolution”.

He gave up his membership in the PRM, after prime minister Radu Vasile called the miners' action a "political strike".

On 10th January the industrial minister promised, that he will erase the debts of the mines, if the unions guarantee a 30% less deficit next year. He openly called the unions to take control of the production in the mines – what an ordinary capitalist was unable to extort from the proletarians, maybe will able the union leaders... And the minister offered again, that they give shares of the mines to each worker – "so in this case the workers would be no more employees of the state, but of themselves." With other words, instead of money they are ready to give some papers to the workers, good for ass-wiping only.

On the next few days it became clear, that these imaginations about the calming down of the anger were without any base. The strikers started to break up the offices of the factories, loot some shops... – and they chased away the policemen from Petroseni. The union leaders and their fellows saw the danger of the generalisation of anger: the most determined proletarians were only some hundreds – but 15.000 hungry and angry miners were already on strike, with at least the same amount of people from their families, and everywhere in the region – peasants, factory workers, even soldiers – were in unrest. Without "positive demands", without any bourgeois aim the danger of generalisation of a proletarian struggle, with proletarian aims was obvious. The last bourgeois solution was in the hand of the trade unions, and especially in the hand of the most radical LFMU led by Cozma. Again he became the key person of the bourgeoisie, the one who can lead the proletarian energies into a democratic trap.

The most urgent thing was to give some positive demands into the mouth of the strikers. It was clear for the unions, that this time they would be unable to operate their "normal" demands, like 10–20% of wage-rises, better conditions of work etc. They were forced to produce something stronger – even if it is absurd. Cozma wrote a declaration of the demands in 30 points (!). He demanded among

by themselves – but did not refused, when capital gave it to their hands.

Nevertheless, the flag was just one thing. The proletarians still did not have any "usable" demand: neither the resignation of the government, nor the rise of the wages. They wanted to go to Bucharest (it is contradictory, as we already mentioned) "to talk a bit with the big bosses".

In Brassow, 200 km from Petroseni, thousands of workers went into the main square of the town, to show their solidarity with the miners. They clashed with the police, throwing stones.

Same time in Bucharest the opposition parties (except the PRM) and NGOs (stalinists included) organised demonstrations against "the anarchy and disorder" and "in the defence of constitutional democracy". The medias did not hesitate to take out also antifascism from their traditional weaponry. The governmental newspaper Romania Libera emphasised, that the "rebelling miners" are working for the international forces of fascism, since Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the leader of the PRM has close links with Saddam Hussein, Le Pen, Zhirinowskhy and Kadhafi... "They want to push Rumania into an Albanian-type civil war, where the role of foreign forces was also obvious" – wrote the Romania Libera. The president of the Bucharest Stock Market declared, that the events danger "the pure existence of the market of capital".

The government ordered the police and the army to stop the miners at the town Costesti at any costs. The police started to centralise its forces near the town. Already in the morning the police-barricades were attacked by the local proletarians, but the force of the enemy this time was too strong, and they won over us. According to the media, against 30.000 miners (at least third of them were not miners at all) they put 18.000 policemen with arms, tear-gas, helicopters, tanks... Cozma stopped the march 20 km from this barricades. "We cannot break through – we have to negotiate, and we won't go to Bucharest" – declared Cozma to "his miners". The confusion was enormous – while Cozma's men tried to calm down

the government was able to close the mines of the Zhil-valley. The international capital started to escape from the country. The stock market was paralysed, and an american company, which planned a 1 milliard dollar investment to Rumanian oil, withdrawn from the country and closed its offices (Olteni is the main oil-field of Rumania).

The Party of Great Rumania wanted to fulfil the same task in the whole country, which was played by Cozma in the Zhil-region. They called for general strike. As – hearing the news from Petroseni – a lot of mines and factories already were on strike (in Iasi, Bucharest, Galati, Brasov and Ploiesti) it seemed, that the PRM is the leader of the strikes. They declared a speech about the “right of the working classes of Rumania” – rather funny from an extreme-right party...

On 20th January the government called an extraordinary meeting of the parliament, which was justified to call a state of emergency in the country. The miners went on in the morning in the direction of Costesti. In all villages ovation welcomed them. In Horezum some policemen gathered to stop the march. But hours before the miners arrived, the local proletarians attacked and destroyed the roadblock, smashed the policemen and burned the local council. In more villages even the news about the miners coming was enough spark to blow the situation: they attacked the local authorities. The miners spent the night in Horezum.

In the photos and films of the media from this day, flags were visible very rarely. We were unable to see any rumanian flags – only one flag, painted black⁷. But next day, 21th January, the miners had a lot of rumanian flags – three-four in every truck and buses. All the flags were brand new, had the same size – they just had come from the factory. Of course, the union distributed them. The proletarians were clear enough not to take the national flag

⁷ Almost sure, that they not used it as a conscious anarchist symbol, but as the flag of their anger – not to do with any national things.

others 500 dollar monthly salary – 150–200% rise – 10.000 dollars for each miner, who get the sack, 2 hectares of field to everybody, the erase of all debts of the miners... It was clear, that the government cannot accomplish any of these points, but they were bright and radical enough to catch a lot of miners. Cozma started to restabilise his credits. He called president Constantinescu to come to Petroseni to negotiate about the demands. The government refused, and wanted to send only a minister or secretary of state... And watching the show, the most of the miners “forget” that they did not wanted to negotiate at all, that they did not demand anything from their enemy... and they connected to the “radical” demands of Cozma, and urged the arrival of the president to Petroseni.

The next – and most important – weapon used by Cozma and his fellows was the famous “miners march to Bucharest”. When the strike began, the trains of the region were all stopped by the government – they remember 1991, when the proletarians of the Zhil-valley occupied the trains, and within hours they were in Bucharest. But this time there were no trains, just some trucks and bad old buses – without fuel. But Cozma declared: if Constantinescu won’t visit them, they will go to Bucharest.

We cannot know, what was the main reason for it. On the one hand, a lot of miners still remember the already legendary “miners marches” of the past (28. January, 1990; 13–15 June, 1990; September 24–27, 1991; 19 March, 1992), and they thought, that this time it will be successful... On the other hand the most determined proletarians saw the possibility to generalise the struggle in this way: “all the people in Rumania are on our side! All the poor peasants, the workers... all the miners. We go to Bucharest – they will join us. The soldiers are our sons...”. As we will see, it was only partially true.

From the point of view of the trade unions, to propagate the march to Bucharest was rather a hazardous plan – but they had no other choice. It was clear, that if they stay in Petroseni, the proletarian anger will explode very soon. But a 200 km long march by open

trucks, or only on foot... among 2000–2500 m high peaks, bad roads, abysses... 20–25 Celsius below zero... constant roadblocks and barricades of the police and the army, helicopters of cops... bad sleeps in overcrowded houses... maybe will be enough to cool down the proletarians.⁶ Cozma led mass-meeting everyday in the yards of the CNH. From the first they the union leaders checked the list of the workers, and write the names of the ones, who did not participate in these meetings. Cozma tried to convince “his” miners to be disciplined – on 14th of January all of them had to sign a paper, that they participate in the strike and go to Bucharest by their free will. A list of the participants was ready for the police. Some hundreds of proletarians refused to take part the Cozma-meetings and to sign this paper. They were talking about to go to Bucharest without the permission of the leaders, “like in September (1991), not like in June (1991)”. These proletarians Cozma called “scabs” and declared, that only that miners will enjoy the fruits of the march, who will go with him. For the others – no rise of the salaries, no 10.000 dollars, no fields on the Moon...

On the 15th of January the prime minister declared the strike to be illegal. On 17th Cozma tried to stop a thousand of proletarians, who started to Bucharest, but the next day all the 15.000 miners started without the permission of Cozma and his companions.

⁶ Although the way from Petroseni to Bucharest is “only” 250 km, the march was not led by this way. The union leaders – who had their own warm cars – made the proletarians to have a small excursion among the hills of Retezath, the wildest mountains of Rumania. “In wintertime we do not recommend tours in the Retezath even for well skilled alpinists. From November until March these hills are extremely dangerous to visit...” (Tourist Guide of Rumania).

Bucharest is in eastern direction from Petroseni. Nevertheless the march turned south, they went through the Vulcan mountains (50 km) until Tirgu Jiu. From here around 100 km to east, until the river Olt, where they turned back to west for a 30 km, and to north until Cozia, 1600 m high among the hills – it is clear, that these roads – full of small bridges and narrow passes, easy to block – never go towards Bucharest, but to the deadly ice of social peace. The miners made a 250 km long march, but they were only 100 km from Petroseni, and still 200 km from Bucharest...

The only thing he could do is to change his song, and stand to the front of the march. First day the miners stopped in the border of Petroseni, where the police made a strong road-block. The police-chiefs told them, that next day, early in the morning president Constantinescu will arrive to negotiate their demands. Cozma called them to go home, and wait for the president. But next day, 19th of January it became clear, that nobody will arrive – the angry proletarians attacked the police. They broke through the barricade without any counterattack – the police officers simply – and cleverly – run away when they saw the running crowd. The miners did not look peaceful in their helmets and with iron bars and hammers in their hand. In front of the crowd a bulldozer attacked the road-block. Although the government in Bucharest gave an order of fire to the police, but in Petroseni nobody was able to obey this order any more... Ten policemen were seriously injured. The government immediately relieved the police-chief of the Zhil-county.

Cozma’s plan for that day was to march until Bumbesti, a small village 20 km south from Petroseni, where he wanted to stop the miners in a stadium, and make speeches to them. But the miners didn’t wanted to stop – “in trance”, as the reporters said they went on. From east, from Olteni from (200 km from Petroseni) 2000 miners joined them with buses. From south 1500 miners from Tirgu Jiu broke the police blockade and joined the march. The ministry of defence mobilised the army. The newspapers in Bucharest published an order of the prime minister to the police, in which he demanded the execution of the leaders of the masses. The miners spent the night in Tirgu Jiu (50 km from Petroseni). Local habitants of the town gave them food and fuel for the cars. A lot of proletarians from there – not only miners – joined the march next morning.

“We won’t let ourselves to be blackmailed” – declared prime minister Radu Vasile in the evening on television – “the credit and the future of Rumania is at risk. (...) The miners have to be realist.” Of course, it was true. Just on the next day, 20th of January arrived the annual investigation committee of the IMF to see, how